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EDITORIALS

THE PAROLE SYSTEM IN CALIFORNIA.

While the system of parole is passing under the eye of the unfavorable critic in the State of Illinois, evidence accumulates that leads us to suspect that the hostile criticism of the system is based not so much upon fact as upon the disposition of the critic; that is, upon his prejudice or sentiment.

In our last number at page 885 ff, we were glad to publish an extended article from the hand of Mr. A. W. Butler, State Secretary of Charities and Correction at Indianapolis. The paper is one that was read at the last annual meeting of the American Prison Association at Oakland, California, in October, 1915. In that paper Mr. Butler reviewed the operation of the parole law in Indiana since its enactment eighteen years ago and showed to the satisfaction of anyone who will read the matter thoughtfully and with an open mind that the system in Indiana is unqualifiedly successful.

We are glad to present below similar data relating to the operation of the parole law in California. We are enabled to offer this through the courtesy of Mr. Edward H. Whyte, State Parole Agent, who may be addressed at his headquarters in San Francisco. We expect to publish additional data in our next number relating to the operation of parole in Illinois.

(See Statistics on p. 121.)

ROBERT H. GAULT.

Handicap of Parole Advocate.—The critic of the parole system in the main has a marked advantage over its advocates before the public because the few paroled prisoners who revert to crime receive marked attention and their delinquencies are heralded abroad, while the many who "make good" and become law abiding members of communities are, from the necessities of the situation, unknown to the public.

Were the prison authorities permitted to publish the long list of paroled men who have taken their places with creditable good conduct among the law abiding citizens of California, and to give their names, addresses, occupations, business, social and personal status, the people of this State would be amazed at the fine showing and proud of the result.

As a matter of fact, out of a total of 3,635 prisoners paroled prior to January 1st of this year (1916), only 128, or 3½%, violated their

paroles by the commission of new crimes. Other violations, bringing the percentage of violations up to 21%, consisted of the breaking of some rule of the Prison Board, such as, drinking intoxicating liquors, leaving place of employment without permission, and the like.

Of course, the prison authorities make an occasional mistake, or, to use the language of the street, an unworthy prisoner does sometimes "get by." These are infrequent occurrences, however, as the records show, and the fact that nearly 80% of the paroled men "make good" and that only 3½% revert to crime, gives evidence of the painstaking care with which this beneficent law is administered.

Beneficial Results of Parole System.—Aside from the personal good accomplished in returning several thousand prospective criminals to the great body of our law abiding and industrially productive citizenship, probably the most important result of our parole law has been the reduction of recidivists in our State prisons.

The parole law was enacted in 1893, but, because of its experimental character, proceedings under it were, for several years, taken with almost prohibitive caution, and but few paroles resulted. Prior to 1900 only 106 prisoners were paroled. Since that date over 3,000 have been paroled.

Statistics covering the three decades from 1880 to 1910 show the following illuminating results:

In 1880 the percentage of recidivists in our State prisons was 22.3 and the percentage of first termers was 77.8.

In 1900 the percentage of recidivists had grown to 25.7, while the percentage of first termers was reduced to 74.3.

In 1910 the percentage of recidivists fell to 18.1, while the percentage of first termers reached 81.9.

This gradual decrease of recidivist percentage is still going on at our prisons.

Thus it will be seen that, prior to 1900, released prisoners were coming back to prison in increasing proportions, while since that date precisely the reverse is true.

So far as prison management enters into this remarkable result, there are just two causes therefor—improved prison management and paroles. However much weight we give the former, the latter unquestionably has been an important factor. The unpleasant truth is that, under our modern prison management, supplemented by our carefully administered parole system, the abnormal increase in our prison population comes, not from those who have served a prior term, but from those who are making their initial entrance into prison.

The total earnings of prisoners while on parole, to this date (January 1, 1916), amount to \$2,015,871.02, and the savings in that period amount to \$464,551.13. While these figures may be uninteresting to many, a close study of them will convince the most skeptical that the parole law of this State, as administered by the State Board of Prison Directors, is an unqualified success. The very fact that the enormous sum, \$2,015,871.02, has been earned by men on parole more convincingly proves that the parole system is a success than could any argument of mine in its favor.

The parole system makes it possible to transform the men who have been convicted of crimes from a cost of \$200.00 a year each, to industrious men, each earning for himself, on an average, \$500.00 a year, and to reunite him with his family, who have been the actual and real sufferers. Picture the child, the wife, mother, or father who has been depending upon the prisoner for support with him removed from the home to prison.

Too many persons are inclined to believe that a sentence to a State penitentiary fundamentally changes the nature of the sentenced man, and that a man with whom they may have previously associated on terms of friendship, as soon as he is confined in prison, loses all attributes of humanity. That forever thereafter he is a thing apart, a beast to be dreaded; therefore, the fair treatment due a man is generally withheld from a prisoner. Experience has shown that this is a grievous error, and that this attitude has worked great harm.

Human nature is not fundamentally changed by the bestowal of the greatest honors, nor is a man radically changed by imprisonment. When the debt to society has been paid by imprisonment, would it not be fair and reasonable for us who have been more fortunate to recognize the settlement and then do all in our power to encourage the unfortunate to again take his place among men?

Of what avail is it to punish a man by a term of imprisonment, during which time he is supported by the public, and upon his discharge, by a course of suspicion and inhuman treatment take away his self-pride, so that he feels himself to be a marked being, to be avoided as dangerous to the community and to those with whom he may come in contact? The result is: He feels that society is his enemy, and that in return he must be an enemy to society. By reason of this condition he commences his war of retaliation and is finally reapprehended, reimprisoned, and the whole foolish round is gone over again. If the public can be taught to see the matter in a business, as well as in a humane, light and discard all unfairly hostile sentiment the

men can be made self-sustaining, but, as it now stands, men discharged or paroled from prison are at a disadvantage, and the wonder is that so many "make good" in spite of the unfavorable conditions which they are compelled to meet.

The Board of Prison Directors of this State is doing all in its power to faithfully follow out the intent and meaning of the parole law, in order to achieve the best results, it should have the proper consideration, aid and co-operation of the public. The public ought to understand that paroles are not granted to prisoners as a matter of personal grace or favor, but because long study and experience have proven that it is best for all concerned—prisoner and public alike—to grant paroles to worthy subjects. A convict, as such, is of no value to himself or the State. If he remains in prison too long—long enough to break his spirit and ambition—he is sure to remain a charge and menace to the State for all his life. If his hope of parole and reformation is kept up, it is a powerful incentive to good conduct and endeavor. The very many instances in which paroled prisoners have "made good" in every sense of the term is conclusive proof of the great value and success of the parole system.

--- INSTITUTE MEETINGS. ---

The annual meeting of the Illinois Branch of the Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology will be of more than usual interest. It will be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the State Bar Association on June 1 and 2 at the Hotel La Salle, Chicago. The address of the president, the Hon. A. C. Barnes, of Chicago, will be followed by the discussion of timely subjects.

At a joint meeting with the Bar Association there will be a discussion of psychopathic laboratories as adjuncts to the criminal courts. At other sessions the claims of vocational education as a preventive of delinquency and the systems of probation and parole which are among our most successful means of correction will be fully discussed. There will be also a review of criminal cases that have been heard before the Supreme Court of the State during the past year.

The next yearly meeting of our national organization will be opened in Chicago Aug. 29, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Bar Association. Secretary Abbott has the committees of the Institute well lined up for their reports and he assures us that a profitable meeting may be expected. It is his plan to distribute the reports of committees among the members of the Institute considerably in advance of the meeting in order that members may come prepared to enter into the discussion.

ROBERT H. GAULT.